

Wesley United Methodist Church

March 3, 2019

“Catch the Vision.”

Luke 9:28-36

A nurse tells about caring for a couple’s newborn son after his cesarean birth. Since the mother was asleep under general anesthesia the nurse took the tiny child directly to the newborn nursery to introduce him to his daddy. While cuddling his son for the first time, the new father noticed something disturbing about his newborn son’s ears. They were rather large and seemed to stand out conspicuously from his head. He expressed his concern that some kids might call his son names like “Dumbo.” The pediatrician reassured the new Dad that his son was healthy, the ears could be easily corrected later during childhood. The father still worried about his wife’s reaction to those large protruding ears. “She doesn’t take things as easily as I do,” he said.

By this time the new mother was ready to meet her precious son. The nurse placed the tiny bundle in his mother’s arms and eased the blanket back so she could gaze upon her child for the first time. She took one look at her baby’s face and looked at her husband and gasped, “Oh, Honey! Look! He has your ears.”

We understand that father’s reaction. The first thing we notice about any person is their appearance. Of course over time our appearance changes.

You may have heard about the elderly woman who, when sitting in the waiting room for her first appointment with a new dentist, noticed his DDS diploma, which bore his full name. Suddenly she remembered that tall, handsome, dark-haired boy with the same name had been in her high school class some 40-odd years before. Could he be the same fellow that she had a secret crush on, way back then?

Upon seeing him, however, she quickly threw out any such thought. This balding, gray-haired man with the deeply lined face was way, way too old to have been her class mate. After he examined her teeth, she got up the courage to ask him if he had by any chance attended Morgan Park High School. “Yes, I did,” he gleamed with pride. “I’m a Morgan Mustang.” “When did you graduate?” she asked. He answered, “In 1969. Why do you ask?” “You were in my class,” she answered. He looked at her closely and then asked, “What did you teach?” Aging changes our appearance.

When we are spending time in the presence of God regularly, our face changes. Does your face say about how much time you’re spending in the presence of God? I’ve known people, that just by looking at them I could tell they’ve spent a lifetime in God’s presence. It shows on their face and how they carry themselves.

Today’s lesson from Luke’s Gospel is about a time when three of Jesus’ disciples saw his appearance change in a powerful way and it had a powerful impact on their lives. You know the story. Jesus often went off by himself for a time to pray. This time he took three of his closest disciples with him—Peter, James and John. Together they went up onto a mountain to pray. And while they were on that mountain, something dramatic happened. Luke tells us, “As Jesus was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash like lightning.” Even more astounding, “Two men, Moses and Elijah, appeared in glorious splendor, talking with Jesus. They spoke about his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfillment in Jerusalem.”

This is important. Luke is saying to us that the events of Good Friday and Easter are part of God’s salvation history. Moses the Law-giver and Elijah the prophet who appeared on the mountain with Jesus are part of that history. From the beginning of creation God has had a plan for earth and its people. We in our greed and irresponsibility often frustrate God’s plan, and one day that plan will be fulfilled.

According to Scripture, “Peter and his companions were very sleepy, but when they became fully awake, they saw Christ’s glory and the two men standing with him. As the men were leaving Jesus, Peter said to him, “Master, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.” Then Luke adds, “Peter didn’t know what he was saying.” Simon Peter is one of us. I have to confess, in such a setting, in the aftermath of such an experience, I wouldn’t have known what to say either.

“While he was speaking,” Luke continues, “a cloud appeared and covered them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. A voice came from the cloud, saying, ‘This is my Son whom I have chosen; listen to him.’ When the voice had spoken, they found that Jesus was alone.” Then Luke adds, “The disciples kept this to themselves and did not tell anyone at that time what they had seen.”

That’s understandable, isn’t it? Who would have believed them anyway? But even more importantly, this was such a deep mysterious experience that they needed time to process it. There was more to this man Jesus than they realized. Sure, Peter had affirmed him as God’s Messiah, but what does that mean?

Perhaps, this is why God is saying to Peter and the other disciples, “Listen to him, you’ve doubted him before, but this time, listen to what he is saying.”

Transformation is what Christ's transfiguration is all about. It is not about Christ's transformation as much as it is about the disciples' transformation—and ours. When you fully understand who Christ is, it changes your life. For example, are you totally happy with who you are? If you don't like the person you are you can change by the grace of God. The word "transform" means "to change into another form." The process of transformation is the renewing of our mind. "As a person thinks in his heart, so is he," says the writer of Proverbs 23:7. The way we think determines the way we live. The goal of transformation, therefore, is that we will put into practice the will of God.

Betty Wein retells an old tale once heard from Elie Wiesel. A just man comes to Sodom hoping to save the city. He pickets. What else can he do? He goes from street to street, from marketplace to marketplace, shouting, "Men and women repent for what you are doing is wrong. It will kill you; it will destroy you." They laugh, but he goes on shouting, until one day a child stops him. "Poor stranger, don't you see it's useless?" "Yes," the man replies. "Then why do you go on shouting?" the child asks. The man answers, "At first I was convinced that I would change them. Now I go on shouting because I don't want them to change me."

We don't want to be changed by the world, but we do want for Christ to change us, just as he transformed those men and women who came to know him personally two thousand years ago. That is why we are here today—to listen to Christ. To catch the same vision as those disciples caught that day on the Mount of Transfiguration. We long to see Christ in all his power and glory, not simply for the spectacle, but for the transformation that might take place within us. We are here today with the prayer that, by God's grace we too can glow in his Spirit.